



(Te Papa, n.d.[a])

Colonial Museum

Man with a vision

James Hector was appointed Director of the Colonial Survey in 1865 after presenting a persuasive case to the government that he run it. He was adamant that the Survey was supported by a museum and laboratory. As he put it: 'One of the most important duties in connection with the geological survey of a new country is the formation of a scientific museum.'

Hector's aim was not to make the museum 'an extensive and showy collection' of specimens. He wanted to create a reference museum that illustrated the Colony's natural history and mineral resources.

The Colonial Museum was one of the first buildings constructed for the government after the capital city moved from Auckland to Wellington in 1865. The museum opened its doors in December. In its first nine months, it received 1600 visitors and accumulated 14,000 specimens and artefacts in its collections.

Multitasker

Hector was the government's only official scientific consultant. With many other scientific bodies placed under his control he was the consummate multitasker. At various times he was in charge of the Meteorological Department, the Colonial Observatory, the Wellington Time-ball Observatory and the Botanic Garden of Wellington. He was also responsible for the Colony's standard weights and measures, and looked after the Patent Office Library.

As the Director of the Museum, Hector automatically became the Manager of the New Zealand Institute. This organisation was set up in 1867 to advance science and art. He oversaw the production of the Institute's journal, the 'Transactions', and prepared many scientific articles and catalogues of exhibits and resources.

End of an empire

Highlights

Click on the thumbnails below to find out more:



Colonial Museum, Wellington, 1865
Made by George O'Brien
watercolour
551 x 916



Colonial Museum, Circa 1880
Made by James Bragge, Wellington
black and white collodion glass negative

Purchased 1955

Interior of the Colonial Museum, Wellington, circa 1895
Made by Herbert Webb
photographic gelatin, silver, black-and-white film



Portrait of Sir James Hector
Made by Leonard Booth
oil on canvas
938 x 735 mm
On loan from the University of New Zealand

Hector eventually retired in 1903, having championed science and New Zealand tirelessly and led the scientific community - sometimes controversially - for forty years. The portrait of Sir James Hector, painted after his death in 1945, is on display in Te Papa's library, Te Aka Matua Library & Information Centre (Level 4).



Map of the Colonial Botanic Garden, about 1875

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